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ABSTRACT

This report describes a pilot project that is investigating the childrearing practices of individuals who have chosen living arrangements different from the traditional two-parent family. Alternative life styles include these groups: (1) unmarried parents who live together, (2) single or unwed mothers, and (3) participants in communes. Depth interviews were administered to counterculture and traditional parents so that comparisons could be made. The interviews probed (1) demographic and personal background information; (2) marital and work status at the time of the child's birth; (3) current living arrangements; (4) birth, medical, and developmental histories of children; and (5) childrearing attitudes and practices. Some attitudes and value systems, which are common for all types of counterculture parents, are reviewed. It is concluded that many characteristics commonly attributed to counterculture families were also evident in contemporary two-parent families. The pilot data suggest that alternative life styles represent a concentrated form of attitudes, values, and behavior that are actually broadly represented in society. Recent changes in childrearing, although ambiguous, may represent major new trends for society. (DP)

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Alternatives in Child Rearing in the '70's

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Since 19-- there is considerable journalistic and informal evidence that many variants of the two-parent nuclear family have been appearing on the American middle class scene (1). Many of these alternative family styles grew out of the "counter-cultures," who were vocally and visibly alienated from society. As many of the social scientists who studied the original middle class turned-off adolescents and young adults in the middle and late 1960's had noted, members of these groups had come from cultured, sophisticated, economically advantaged homes, had been carefully reared by mothers (often well-educated and trained) who had assumed traditional roles and had taken their child-rearing functions seriously and devotedly (2).

The members of the counter-cultures thus were themselves educated and sophisticated. In the values they espoused -- their search for humanism, for meaningful personal relationships, for non-violent solutions, for direct and uninhibited gratifications, for maximizing individual potential and respecting individual difference -- their anti-authority and anti-Establishment attitudes were focal. Since these counter-culture people were of child-bearing age, it raised the question of how children in alternative family styles were being reared (3).

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Children had been mentioned superficially and in an off-handed way in most of the writing on the counter-cultures. The bulk of the lively journalistic and social science interest in alienated young people had been devoted to their struggles to separate themselves and to be separated from

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the Establishment (4); with their value systems and beliefs; and with the life styles which they set up in order to have an opportunity to live in ways that would better express both their values and their outrage at traditional and "system-bound" ways of living (5). The most telling reports have come from journalistic documentation, often self-revelatory (6). These books compare in interest, if not depth, with the fascinating historical research accounts of earlier attempts in American history to cope with difference, disappointment, frustration, and denial by the majority of society (7). In these latter, the role of children is given some attention, particularly as the structure of the groups, as intentional communes, aimed at complete self-sustenance and isolation from involvement with formal institutions in the outside community. Then planning for the children's upbringing and education and roles grew out of a need to formalize structures and responsibility, out of a sense of commitment to the group, and to guarantee its perpetuity (8).

In accounts of current alternative life styles, children have generally been more casually treated, an indication perhaps of their more informally developed roles. In a pilot study undertaken by the UCLA Project, all references to children in twelve volumes on alternative life styles were collated, and a content analysis of specific dimensions related to demographic and behavioral characteristics -- as the number involved, their activities, roles, the caretaking arrangements to which they were exposed, their eating, sleeping, play arrangements (9). These volumes dealt primarily with communes, but also included bibliographies on single mothers who establish one-parent families by keeping their infants, and group marriage arrangements.

It was evident from these accounts -- which are admittedly more journalistic than scholarly, -- that children were by and large a secondary source of concern. That is, the life styles had been entered into by parents because of their own needs, desires, motivations and preferences; and that the needs of children had usually been thought afterward to be also well-met in the arrangement that had emerged in order to meet the need of the parent. This is not to say that no thought was given to child care and to optimizing the child's environment in line with what parents regarded as valuable psychological and physical nutrients for growth. In some cases this was indicated in these accounts. And in subsequent pilot work undertaken by this project through detailed, standardized depth interviews and home observations, this had been shown not only to be the case, but even to a degree which is scarcely matched in other than highly sophisticated day-care centers or Kibbutz-like family models (10). Furthermore, in these reports, the meshing between parent needs and child needs often appeared very skillful, so that it was arbitrary to try to say how the arrangement was actually effected, or why.

Nevertheless, this content analysis piece of work did direct our project's attention to the more peripheral role of the child at this early stage in the development of alternate family styles when a good deal of pioneering experimentation was taking place. In the effort to understand the implications of this for the child's growth and development and to learn how counter-culture values were being transmitted to children, and in order to obtain data on accessibility of these groups to study, the UCLA group continued with a year of pilot studies. This work involved detailed depth interviews with the parent which were focused on child-rearing practices and child growth. From these we obtained insights into the philosophy of

these groups and their attitudes toward child rearing, and could contrast these findings with data obtained from young families of the 1970's who are living in the more traditional two parent families.

First, some background data on the alternative groups studied:

1. The "unmarried marrieds" were defined as a 2-parent family whose structure existed as a social, rather than a legal contract. The literature, and subsequently our pilot work, suggested that this group did in many ways share the philosophy of the "turned-off" middle class counter-cultures (11). Living together as "unmarried marrieds" has little similarity with the "shacking up" of previous generations; or with the large number of "common law" marriages found among the poor who experience constraints and problems associated with legal marriage. Rather this alternative form of "marriage" involves an ideological commitment to a relationship rather than to joint living by virtue of a new legal status. Rejection of the concept of legal marriage is fundamentally a conviction that the bond of love and trust that holds them together is much more important and stronger than the legal bond authorized by church and state could be (12).

In the family setting, parents spend long periods of time with one another and share the same emotional exchanges of closeness and rejection, desire and repulsion, and certainty and uncertainty about each other as found in more traditional marriages; yet there is a frankness and openness about their status. They do not hide their approach to life; frequently they display both of their names on the mailboxes.

Since the possible instability of the relationship might be critical in

a child's development, we explored parental motivations for this life style. While some are not officially married because they refuse to accept the civil contract that attests to the fact that they are now annointed by the establishment -- secular or religious -- others simply do not accept the relevance of the marriage contract to their relationship as it exists for them at the moment, wishing no structural constraints to their "splitting" if things change between them. Still others seek to avoid the evident unhappiness and misery of many legal marriages, especially those in which they grew up. By contrast, living together is seen as representing true maturity in an acceptance and faith they place in one another (13).

Many of the unmarried marrieds are either students or ex-students living close to campus environments, but apparently large numbers of persons are also living in such arrangements outside of campus environments (personal communication, Bureau of the Census, 1971).

In our feasibility studies "unmarried married" couples appeared to share a value system with a strong emphasis on personal relationships and humanism. This and the women's consciousness and liberation movements play a strong philosophical role in determining child-care patterns and attitudes. In all our pilot cases the father was present at birth and enjoyed an active role in early child-caring activities and play with the child. The choice of having the child appeared even more determined than in the traditional family in as much as the option of termination of pregnancy was freely available, without the guilt associated with such termination in the traditional family. From this aspect, and on the basis of data about child care which is elaborated below, we regard this family style as a form of very motivated parenting by two parents, at least during the

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early periods of development. Children seem to have a close and intimate contact starting in infancy, when they are often strapped to the mother's back, accompanying her in all her activities, even school classes. There are few times the child is left with others; the more customary practice is to build the child's activities and caretaking to mesh with the parents' availability. Fathers alternate with mothers in staying home -- and share almost all the activities that have to do with the child. In fact, in one family studied in the pilot group, the child called the father "Mama Tom." The intimacy of the family group also extends to encouraging with the child the same affection and openness and expression of sensuous pleasures. This is in line with the rationale of personal commitment and enjoyment for the "unmarried married" relationship.

2. <u>The single mother, or unmarried mother</u>, is far from a new phenomenon in our society. Yet there has been a significant change reflecting this alternative way of bearing and raising children in society today (14). It has not only been the "pill" that has emptied the adoption agencies of children available for adoption at birth but also a new perspective on the part of many single parents to keep their children and raise them without the guilt associated with that circumstance in previous generations. (The institutionalized acceptance of the single parent is also evident in their acceptability to agencies as adoptive parents for older, "harder to place" children (15).) The women's movement and the "turned off" middle class student were forceful agents in making parenthood a viable option for a woman, whether she is married legally or not. Young women from middle class families in increasing numbers are allowing their pregnancies to continue and keeping their children after birth (16). Under such conditions a variety of styles of mothering have emerged, since a

single mother requires a variety of supports if she is to have some opportunity to become economically independent and socially involved.

Among the family styles which our pilot work encountered as ways frequently chosen by single mothers were small group homes, or boarding homes where a number (4-10) of single mothers live together with their children; foster homes for mother and child; as well as living alone in an apartment. The actual physical arrangements for the child differ among residences but in general mother and child have a room or apartment-like set-up, for their own sleeping, and then share common dining and living room quarters with the larger family unit in group homes. A parent alone usually lives in a small apartment, but many prefer to share a house with a like parent and child. The possibility of children's eating and playing together, sharing toys, etc., is usually considered one of the advantages for children in group living arrangements.

In addition, some communities have developed programs which facilitate a young mother's return to school or work so that she can gain skills necessary for an independent existence (17). Although the programs are still largely educational, some are experimental in providing child-rearing training and social exchanges, suggesting that the Establishment recognizes that complex needs of the "parent in adolescence " must be met in order for the child to grow up in a healthy way. Child care facilities, caretaking arrangements in high schools, training centers, infant caretakers in group home settings reflect the kinds of assistance the community has developed, which means that most children of single parents are exposed to multiple caretaking as early as six weeks of age.

Societal recognition of this family arrangement has also encouraged single

parents to move toward developing organizations and social networks which provide them with some of the personal contacts that the early responsibilities of single parenthood might reduce. Unlike parent groups of older persons who have opted for single parenthood see themselves as progressive, and experimental (18). The expansion of organizations, such as Momma League, and La Leche League, into activity programs, information and training centers, as well as consciousness-raising efforts, also suggests how sensitive the middle class single mother is to her needs, and how different from the largely lower-class single mother of yesteryear. A good deal of the organizational activity centers around programming for children, so mothers exchange views as to how to rear them in line with their anti-sexist philosophy, and develop social arrangements that may compensate for non-existent siblings and fathers. Out of those exchanges grow a variety of family arrangements and residences on a more or less temporary basis. Therefore this population provides some of the most ample opportunity for observing an alternative in family style that has voluntarily, and proudly, turned its back on the "Establishment" nuclear family.

3. Communes. Creating a communal alternative to isolated nuclear family living is not in itself a new experience in this country. Some Americans have always sought a new start along with an expression of dissent against the status quo. From what they were dissenting and in what ways they chose to organize their new communal existence varied in past generations as it does for today's communards. Some were based upon religious convictions and others upon economic idealism and a rejection of gross economic inequalities. Some rebelled from authority and attempted to establish a model of governing based upon an absence of central authority, while others sought a strict structure with clear lines of hierarchical authority with

ultimate rejection from the community for those who could or would not yield to such authority. Some have relatively long histories such as the Bruderhof, while others such as the intellectual community, "Brook Farm" in Massachusetts, rather rapidly dissolved (19). The life styles displayed by the current commune movement is perhaps even greater than the well-known historical models, making even definition of this alternative life style problematic; communes vary today in type of membership, organizational structure and general purpose (20). Some are involved in agricultural subsistence, seeking a closeness to the land characterized by the early close-knit communities reported to have existed in our past history, while others are composed of middle class young professionals who do not wish to disengage from the urban scene or its various technological comforts. They vary in size from twelve or less to hundreds. A significant number are based upon religious commitments of various persuasions. Many of the new religious communes are steeped in Eastern philosophy and culture; others are part of the new "Jesus movement" searching for a new way to live out traditional Judeo-Christian convictions. Communes are often formed around common interests, crafts or some unifying goal. They begin with people who find each other, like each other, and share a similar value system. The sharing of political views and convictions is often an important aspect of these intentional communities. Some communes are in fact composed of political activists who see their alternative life styles as a reflection of the social revolution they believe in and the beginning of a radical change in everyday life starting with family organization.

Some communes are reported to be group-marriage oriented. This is apparently an extremely small number. One such group called "The Family" lives in Taos, New Mexico, and has a life style in which they share in common

the children of the group, now knowing or caring which individuals have been biologically responsible for the union of sperm and ovum. A similar commune exists nationally with a sizeable base in Los Angeles. Other groups are oriented as extended families, with couples remaining essentially monogamous in their own private quarters, although the partners may change from time to time. Still others live together under a community concept rather than as a family unit, sharing those things that seem to them more effectively achieved in multiple family cooperatives such as expenses, household chores and child care responsibilities. The organization of such groups has been given impetus particularly by the women's consciousness movement.

The lifespan of the current communes varies considerably. Some stay together only for the initial glow of commradery, while others, in increasing numbers, develop a stable group of committed members with more long-lasting aspirations for their community. Such issues as organization of work and other aspects of living, interpersonal relationships, economic feasibility and ability to buffer or cope with the outside community harassment have been suggested as germane to the stability of communal arrangements (21).

The residential arrangements often determine to a large extent adult-child relationships. Living arrangements show variety and ingenuity: tents and cabins in rural areas; apartment houses and motels in cities. Eating and sleeping arrangements for adults and children vary with the specific commune. As the 1970 Census found (personal communication, 1972), their usual criteria of common entry-hall and kitchen proved inadequate to the task of categorizing group living arrangements; and many were coded as boarding houses! Separate family houses, children's houses, baby nurseries, and other unit arrangements are common as community houses. Struc-

tures vary from lean-to's and buses to elaborate frame and stone buildings.

The number of children varies from commune to commune. In general, the adult/child ratio of 2½:1 cited by Fairfield (22) and Cavan (23) seems to hold. The adults are conscious of the population explosion, and therefore, few parents with more than three biological children are evident; but "families" with 8-10 children are not infrequent. Birth, pregnancy and children are esteemed and joyously regarded as an expression of a natural, ecologically-appropriate experience.

Adult-child relations are often determined by proximity of living and particularly of sleeping quarters. Relations with biological parents may be infrequent when children are physically separated from adults and caretakers assigned, as they are in some instances. A child's relationship with other adults is also related to the extent to which a hierarchical structure of relations or responsibilities exists (24). Interestingly, a family multiple dwelling arrangement can permit a child to move among households, as when he is in conflict with other household members, lonely for peers, or when his family is "splitting" for a time (25).

Interview data during pilot work elaborated the wide range of child-rearing practices found among communes in relation to caretaking. Detailed interviews with commune parents about their own and their children's life styles permitted us to look for common denominators among practices, and for dimensions in the "family" structure and philosophy that might account for differences. A number of dimensions stood out as possibly salient: age of the child; number of caretakers; area in which the commune existed, as rural/urban; accessibility to resources in the outside community; residential mobility of the immediate family; creedal or non-creedal affiliation (26); a conscious concern with planning (although not "scheduling") for a child's daily activities vs. a laissez-faire attitude toward

child activities.

These three family styles, then, the unmarried marrieds; single mothers; and communes were selected for comparison with the 2-parent nuclear family of today.

Values and Attitudes in Regard to Child-Rearing: Data from detailed interviews were analyzed to provide a picture of current child-rearing practices, attitudes and value systems of parents from each population. The children around whom the interviews were focused ranged from 1 month to 4 years. Interviews provided such data as demographic and personal background information on parents; marital and work status at time of child's birth; current living arrangement; birth; medical and developmental history of the child; attitudes and practices concerning eating, sleeping, discipline, sex, rules, scheduling; child problem areas; social and emotional development; aspirations for the child, etc.

Data were categorized and scaled for comparative analysis of environments and child-rearing practices and attitudes. Findings showed some similarities in practices that had been attributed solely to some counter-cultures. Breast feeding is now routine in young mothers, e.g. Also in all groups, babies are carried on the mother's back and accompany her most of the time, so there is almost constant physical proximity between mother and child in the first year of life. In most areas, however, there was considerable range in practices stemming from shared attitudes and values so that family groups could be scaled in terms of frequency with which specific practices are adopted. Some of the attitudes and value-systems found commonly in experimental groups that are likely to effect a child's development are as follows:

(1) Intense mother-child relationships from birth through the first two or two and a half years, with a clear break in this pattern in the direction of independence and self-reliance at 2½ or 3 years. The latter comes at a time when the youngster has been weaned (breast-feeding may extend until this time), and is mobile, and when the mother begins to think of herself and her own needs and wishes to return to previous activities.

(2) At the same time that an intense attachment to a single caretaker is fostered, there is also an attempt to develop in the child a generalized sense of trust to other care-taking adults. This may be through the use of multiple caretakers, or in the switching of infants among young mothers for breast feeding. Multiple caretakers sometimes have differences in perspectives around caretaking, making for inconsistencies. In fact, commune members report that differences over child-rearing are a common source of family difficulty.

(3) Good health, in line with a desire for wholesomeness and a oneness with the environment, assumes important proportions. Many experiences, like childbirth, are considered to be "natural," rather than "illnesses." Natural foods comprise the bulk of the diet; in most cases children's dietary input is restricted in regard to sweets and other "junk" food. Dependence on institutionalized medical and dental services is limited to emergencies, with self-help medical and pharmacological expertise encouraged. Few preventive interventions are sought.

(4) While non-violence is generally espoused among counter-culture groups, certain dissonant practices are seen in regard to the handling of aggressive behaviors between children, and in parental disciplinary attitudes and practices. In line with parental desires for each child to be assertive (and particularly for girls on whom that "passive role has been foisted by

stereotypic cultural attitudes") generally children are allowed to work out relationships with peers without adult interference; in fact, direct interrelations are fostered. Only the demands of safety take precedence. Again, in regard to discipline, although the perpetration of violence is seen as a violation of individuality -- and the child is seen as having rights as an individual -- parents acknowledge that there are times when his own needs take precedence over the child's and demand that he impose discipline, even physical punishment. Discipline ranging over the spectrum from total non-violence to "an eye for an eye" has been identified.

(5) Humanistic and interpersonal relationships and the direct expression of affectional needs are highly valued. In line with this, there is a desire to cast off artificial repression of sexuality and intimacy. For the child this means exposure to adult nudity and observation of sexual activity, and a certain permissiveness around instinctual drives which may or may not go with opportunities for acting out. There are differences among and within family styles in regard to the latter; but in general parents aim for more freedom in their children and earlier sophistication.

(6) Child-peer relationships become potent socializing agents, since early independence from mother often moves a child into "juvenile groups" as replacement. Peers are depended upon for support and decision; and age mates are closely modelled.

(7) Early decision-making is encouraged in the child in line with the philosophy that a child has individual rights, and has a role in participatory democracy. In some family groups, conscious politicization of children is encouraged. Group decision-making by parents is modelled by children as an important mode for solving problems.

(8) Parents are ambivalent about serving as models for identification. They shrink from "putting their trip" on the child; yet they admit to value and life style preferences, and thus reinforce these behaviors of the child which are consonant with their attitudes. They also resist serving as identification models because of their more or less consistent acceptance of an anti-sexist philosophy; thus, mothers are not willing to have their girls identify with them as not-completely-emancipated women; similarly with boys and males.

(9) Achievement striving is played down, except for the desire to become competent and thus fulfill individual potential and creativity. Competition as a motivational force is repressed. Sensory impressions, intuition, the occult as opposed to the rational, are appropriate data for the enhancement of creativity. Children are expected to be able to distinguish what is appropriate behavior within the "family" and for the "outside world."

(10) Because materialistic values are tied in with technological advance and non-humanistic goals, dependence on possessions and material objects is minimized whenever possible. Children have few toys. Personally-owned objects are minimal as compared with objects that are shared by the group, when the child is in a "group family." Also, children observe adults proudly "ripping off" the outside world, and ignoring social contracts involving personal ownership. The variability found in the alternative family groups in implementing these general child-rearing attitudes made it evident that systematic studies of these groups must take account of the variety or extremes in child-rearing practices within the populations.

One of the other findings from the pilot data is that many of the findings attributed to and identified with counter-culture families were also found in the contemporary two-parent families. Pilot data suggest that the alternative life styles represent a concentrated form of attitudes, values, and behaviors, that are broadly represented in contemporary society, but which are not recognized as such because they are more amorphous and poorly crystallized. Even at a superficial level it is clear that much that passes through the communication media-TV, movies, magazines, books, newspapers--finds a more logically consistent expression in some of the "alternative life styles" than in the bulk of society, and yet, elements seem to be broadly based in general society (27). This appears to be the case with child-rearing practices too, for pilot work showed that many of the parental behaviors and values in regard to children that had been attributed to the counter-cultures in literature, journalism and popular myth, were in actuality also found to be characteristic of parents who were living in the nuclear two-parent family today. To note a few examples: breast feeding was the only mode of feeding in control and experimental samples; independence and self-reliance was fostered in all children as they reach pre-school age, with many of the same practices being used across populations to encourage this characteristic; meaningful interpersonal relationships were valued over the encouragement of intellectual resources.

Thus, the changes in child-rearing values and practices that now are manifest in embryonic and ambiguous form, sometimes as apparently isolated events, may well be auguring new directions of child-rearing in the mainstreams of society in the future. It is important and timely, therefore, to discuss and study what the implications of such changes will be for the infant and

growing child.

What is the likely impact of multiple caretaking and multiple models on the child's social and emotional development? of non-differentiated roles of father and mother in parenting? of the fluid family with its combination of fixed and transient members? of frequent early and purposeful exposure to intimacy and sexuality? of the humanist perspective? of an ambivalent and even hostile interfacing with established institutions? of the parental conflicts around freedom and control that go with a permissive and laissez-faire "do your own thing" orientation? What is the impact of the natural food, health-oriented diets, changes in customary sleeping and eating arrangement, and of the disavowal of established medical practices on the child's physical growth and development? How do parental non-achievement and non-intellectual attitudes and practices influence cognitive growth and intellectual development of the child? A host of such questions is readily generated from new value systems and practices. The answers are not readily forthcoming. In fact, one colleague remarked that this is an area in which the most sophisticated of us has a difficult time predicting results in advance. It is this challenge, this fascinating, provocative, and compelling problem to which we are addressing ourselves today.

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